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## Local

### City, state partner to help pay off hot weather energy bills

by Karen E. Pride, Chicago Defender  
August 3, 2005

Low-income energy customers have a multi-million dollar fund to help offset their air-conditioning bills thanks to a partnership between the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois, but they need to act quickly.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich announced Monday that he would make \$8 million available in cooling grants and directed the state Department of Healthcare and Family Services to provide those grants through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

Applicants who qualify will be awarded the cooling grants on a first come, first serve basis through August 12, or until the funding is exhausted.

In addition to the state money, ComEd is creating the Cool Care Fund of \$3 million to assist its low-income customers, bringing the total assistance fund to \$11 million for the duration of the heat wave affecting the Midwest.

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ComEd spokeswoman Tabrina Davis told the Chicago Defender that \$2 million of company profits will go to the state's LIHEAP and the remaining \$1 million will go to the city to enhance their emergency response efforts to combat the heat.

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### PHILL WILSON



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"We've been feeling some of the hottest weather in 10 years," she said. "We recognize this is a hardship on some of our most vulnerable customers so we felt it was appropriate to take this step to assist them."

The funds will probably go quickly, said Davis, "so we encourage customers in need to apply as soon as possible."

Davis added disconnections of customers whose energy bills were severely in arrears have gone back into effect.

ComEd had offered a reprieve for those consumers from July 21 to July 25 in anticipation of the scorching heat on July 24.

"The temperatures subsided that Tuesday (July 26) and it's certainly something we may consider in the future if the weather dictates," Davis said.

Still, some consumers and community activists question why the money is available now, instead of weeks ago when the city experienced day after day of intense and dangerous heat.

"People are just starting to receive their bills as a result of the heat wave three weeks ago, so there was nothing to act on other than establishing the cooling centers," Cheryle Jackson, Blagojevich's spokeswoman told the Defender. "The first round of bills is for heavy fan and air conditioner use."

Jackson said in extreme weather conditions, such as the 90-plus temperatures of last month, and in very cold weather, "we have a responsibility to help those citizens in the city and state with the greatest needs, like seniors, the very young and the disabled, and that's what this partnership is about."

She said Blagojevich also sent a letter to President George W. Bush, asking him to release the remaining \$47.6 million in federal emergency aid now, rather than when the federal fiscal year ends on Sept. 30.

"That would mean an additional \$1.7 million for Illinois," she said.

***Anyone interested in applying for the cooling grants can get a complete list of the LIHEAP administering agencies at [www.liheapillinois.com](http://www.liheapillinois.com) or by calling toll-free (800) 252-8643 during business hours Monday through Friday.***